DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 164 171 RC 010 968

AUTHOR Edington, Everett D.
TITLE Rural Youth: The Neglected Minority. A Presentation in the College of Education Dialogue Series, New Mexico State University.
PUB DATE 9 Nov 78
NOTE 19p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Achievement; American Indians; *Aspiration; Caucasians; Cultural Differences; Expectation; Mexican Americans; Mobility; Occupations; Place of Residence; *Rural Urban Differences; *Rural Youth; *Self Concept; *Socioeconomic Status; Suburban Youth; Urban Youth; Values

ABSTRACT

Rural youth are a diverse group not only geographically, but socioeconomically, ethnically, and culturally as well. Historically, the rural student has not achieved as well as his urban counterpart in high school or in post secondary education. There is evidence that this is beginning to change and that rural students are doing as well or better than urban students, but are still slightly behind surburban students. Rural youth are at a disadvantage on the job market; schools have not adequately trained them for the world of work when compared to other youth. The paper also reports on occupational, educational, and residence aspirations and expectations. Comparisons of self concept and values between rural and other students are also discussed. (EE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Everett D Edington

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND THE ERIC SYSTEM CONTRACTORS."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

NEW MEXICO STATE UNIVERSITY

ED164171

A DIALOGUE SERIES Monograph

Rural Youth: The Neglected Minority

by Everett D. Edington

RC 010968

A Presentation in the College of Education

DIALOGUE SERIES

Thursday, November 9, 1978

RURAL YOUTH - A FORGOTTEN MINORITY

A Presentation in the College of Education

DIALOGUE SERIES

New Mexico State University
Las Cruces, New Mexico

by

Everett D. Edington, Ed.D.
College of Education
New Mexico State University

November 9, 1978

RURAL YOUTH - A FORGOTTEN MINORITY

They are found from Kodiak, Alaska, to Wiwuhiska, Florida, to Bangor, Maine, to Many Farms, Arizona, and the vast, wide-open spaces in-between. They are the rural youth of America. Approximately 30 percent of the population of this vast land live in rural areas. There have been no riots to publicize their plight. With the exception of a few isolated cases, rurals have been almost completely ignored by the vast Great Society programs and those which followed, which had as their major purpose the betterment of programs for our nation's youth.

Diversity is common among the people in the rural regions. Some are extremely poor--the highest percentage of poverty-level families reside in the rural areas of our nation. Others are quite wealthy--as evidenced by the large ranches and oil rich areas of our Midwest and West. Some are Black, with 40 percent of the nation's rural people found in the Southern States. Others are the American Indian, found on the parched reservations throughout much of Western America; the Spanish-speakers of the Southwest; the Eskimo of Alaska; and the Anglo of the Great Plains. The rural youth of America are characterized more by their diversity than by their similarities.

The vast rural/urban migrations which were characteristic of the period during and after World War II, however, have recently begun to slightly reverse. From 1970 to 1973, the non-metropolitan areas gained 4.2 percent population growth, compared to only 2.9 percent for the metropolitan areas (Sher, 1977).

Like rural America and it's people, the rural schools and local education authorities are quite diverse. Such range from the large jointures

of Pennsylvania, with up to 2,000 young people in a high school setting, to over 100 one-room schoolhouses still found in Nebraska. Table 1 gives an indication of the large numbers of school districts in the non-metropolitan areas of the United States. Of a national total of almost 17,000 districts, nearly 12,000 are located in rural areas, whereas less than 5,000 are found in the metropolitan regions of the United States. Taken together, these approximately 12,000 districts have almost one-third of the total school enrollment in the United States.

Henderson (1973) pointed out that, while many of the problems found in rural schools are similar to those of urban schools, there are many dissimilarities. It is safe to assume that some of the same generalities hold true for rural and urban youth. As a result, educational programs need to be devised which specifically meet the needs of rural students.

Hughes and Spence (1971) concluded that very often the efforts of the public schools seem to be based on assumptions that have no validity for all children. The values of the teachers and the very purpose of schooling may not be appropriate for all children. They noted than many rural children fail to complete the twelve years of schooling required for a high school diploma. Frequently, school curriculum is built around the needs of the urban and suburban child, and completely ignores the specific and special needs of rural students. Such incompatibilities trigger those dropouts.

Rural youth frequently have lower educational and occupational aspirations, less training, fewer marketable skills, a different value orientation, and personality characteristics which prevent them from competing adequately for all but employment at the lower end of the continum. In addition, rural school patrons often resist efforts to initiate curriculum innovations and

TABLE 1

Size of Public Schools and School Districts in Metropolitan and Non-Metropolitan Areas of the United States, 1971-72

Areas	Enrollment (K-12)	Percentage of Total U.S. Enrollment	Number of School Districts	Average School District Enrollment	Number of Schools	Average School Enrollment
All Metropolitan Areas of the U.S.	30,408,000	66%	4,781	6,360	47,849	635
All Non-Metropolitan Areas of the U.S.	15,615,000	34%	11,800	1,323	39,544	395
U.S. Total	46,023,000	--	16,581	2,776	87,393	527

SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1972 Census of Governments: Governmental Organization (Vol. 1) (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, July 1973), Table 17; also U.S. Deaprtment of Health, Education and Welfare Statistics of Local Public School Systems, Pupils, and Staff, Fall 1971, National Center for Educational Statistics (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975), Table A.

new teaching techniques. Rural schools are among the slowest changing institutions in America. Further, Henderson (1973) stressed that a handicap of rural education is the fact that local communities are reluctant to turn their schools over to professional educators. Rural school administrators, in an effort to placate the typically conservative school board, frequently resist the idea of allowing teachers and students academic freedom. In many cases, the rural administrator serves as guidance counselor, as well as teacher/educational jack-of-all pedagogy, to assist his school staff throughout the academic year.

Rural/Urban Differences

Throughout the 1940's, 1950's, and 1960's, many research studies revealed vast differences between urban and rural children and youth. However, these differences are beginning to disappear during the 1970's as rural childrens' achievement levels begin to approach those of urban children. Yet, many dissimilarities still persist. Studies and research have indicated that the students of small rural schools do not perform as well scholastically in either high school or college as do those from larger suburban and metropolitan schools (Edington, 1976). There are important indications that rural and small school students are not as well prepared for the world of work as students from larger schools who enjoy the advantages of a broader curriculum. There has been extensive research into the occupational and educational aspirations of rural youth, particularly in the South. These studies reveal that rurals generally have lower expectations and aspirations than do urban youth. However, it is found that the expectations of rural children have risen, though they still lag far behind those of their urban counterparts (Edington, 1976).

With the exception of the very young, urban residents are almost always better educated than rural residents, regardless of sex, age, maturity, race or parentage (Edington, 1970).

In a more recent study, Abt Associates (1977), while finding generally negligible differences among rural, small town, suburban, and urban high school seniors, found a sizeable difference in one critical area of aspirations. Fewer rural than urban senior high school students aspire to or actually do attend academic post-secondary education programs. Abt found that only 32.6 percent of their rural sample attended academic courses at two or four-year colleges, compared to 54.3 percent of the urban sample. Only 29.5 percent of the rural sample planned to attend four-year colleges, compared to 43.2 percent of the urban sample. The Abt Study also found a similar disparity in post-graduate educational aspirations, with 26.5 percent of the rural sample (as compared to 45.9 percent of the urban sample) hoping to attain higher degrees. Conversely, a substantial number of rural graduates hoped to or planned to attend a trade or business school, or take vocational/technical courses.

Of the 25 questions asked pertaining to career and life values, the Abt Study results reflected significant differences on five questions: (1) Living and working in/with the world of ideas (urban and suburban students placed more value on this question); (2) Being able to give my children better opportunities than I've had (urban and small town students valued it less); (3) Getting away from this area of the country (urban students valued mobility less than small town and rural students); (4) Being able to find steady work (rural students valued it more); (5) Being a leader in my community (urban students valued it less). In summary, rural graduates were

more concerned with finding steady work, less concerned with working and living in the world of ideas, and more concerned with being a leader in their home community.

Socio-Economic Status

Edington (1970) indicated that research reveals a definite relationship between socio-economic status and educational levels in rural America--"as socio-economic status rises, educational achievement levels increase." This same relationship exists in the general population and is found in urban and suburban locations as well. Generally speaking, however, the socio-economic background of the rural, small school student (regardless of ethnicity) is considerably below that of urban youth. Although the population of rural America comprises only 30 percent of this nation's total population, approximately 40 percent of those families classified as at poverty level or below reside in rural areas.

A large number of rural youth share the common characteristics of poverty and isolation. Isolation tends to limit the child and confines his/her cultural experiences to one's own group. This relative isolation also creates difficulties for the school in aiding students to understand people of different ethnic and economic backgrounds, thereby broadening their educational experiences. Not all of our rural youth are below the poverty line. There is great disparity among the socio-economic levels in rural America. Often found in the same school are the children of the wealthy landowner and the migrant farm worker who follows the crops.

Aspirations and Expectations

The largest body of research related to rural youth in America is in

the area of aspirations and expectations in education, occupations, and mobility or place of residence. This work has been done primarily by the S-81 Agricultural Experiment Station Committee in seven Southern States. Earlier research of this nature was done by Sewell in Washington and Haller (1969) and others in Wisconsin. Edington and Stout contributed in the aspirations and expectations area primarily in working with rural American Indians in New Mexico and Arizona. Much of this research shows that rural youth have lower educational and occupational expectations and aspirations than the urban counterpart. Kuvlesky and Edington (1970) indicated, however, that the aspirations and expectations of rural youth are rising but are still far behind those of their urban counterparts. Edington, Pettibone, and Heldt (1975) found significant differences in educational aspirations related to grade level and sex by ethnic group interaction. Seniors aspired to more education than sophomores. Native American males aspired to significantly less education than all groups except Mexican American females. Educational expectation differences were found to be related to grade level and the sex by ethnic group interaction. Seniors expected more education than sophomores. Native American males expected significantly less education than the Native American female or Anglo American male. Mexican American females expected to receive less education than did Anglo American males. Kuvlesky and Edington (1976) reported that several important inter-ethnic differences are significant to status goals that exist among the males. Most of these are found among Navajo youth where substantially fewer of them have high level job goals. Many more of the Navajo males had low level goals and intermediate ones when compared to males of other ethnic groups. Anglos are inclined to have higher life goals than Blacks and Mexican Americans. Blacks have the second highest percentage of low level aspirations.

The ethnic differences observed among the four female ethnic groupings, as far as occupational aspirations is concerned, were quite similar to those noted for the males. The Navajo girls were marked[illegible] less inclined to indicate high goal levels and had by far the highest proportion of intermediate level goals. Mexican American girls had surprisingly similar goal level profiles with the surprising exception that Anglo girls were more likely to have low level goals. The Mexican American girls had generally the highest level occupational goals.

An interesting concept looked at by some researchers is that known as occupational educational goal deflection. This is the difference between a youth's aspirations and expectations. Generally, their expectations were lower than their aspirations. This may possibly influence a poor self-concept as well as frustration when they aspire to educational or occupational goals which they feel they cannot reach. Goal deflection is higher for Mexican American, Anglo and Black youth than for Native American youth. This is probably due to the observation that the aspirations were lower for the Native American and probably much more realistic as well as their expectations. A more recent study (Abt, 1977) indicated that fewer rural than urban seniors planned to aspire to or actually do attend academic post-secondary programs.

Resident aspirations and expectations showed another interesting phenomena. Abt (1977) demonstrated how small these differences turned out to be. Nearly identical percentages of high school graduates from rural and urban areas remained in the same place. A major difference was found between small town and suburban residents. With the former, 43.8 percent remained in their home communities, while 53.3 percent of the latter had

remained. Edington, Pettibone, and Heldt (1975) found that males aspired more to a rural environment than did females; Mexican Americans aspired to a significantly more urban environment than the Native American and Anglo American. Significant residence expectation differences were also found due to sex and ethnicity. Males had more rural expectations than females. The Native American expected to live in a rural environment more than Anglo Americans or Mexican Americans. Anglo American students had significantly higher goal deflection than the Native American and the Mexican American. This means that more of them aspired to move to urban settings than really expected same.

Attainment

Studies have indicated that students from small schools do not perform as well scholastically in high school and college as do those from larger and urban schools (Edington, 1976). Edington discussed these findings in detail in his publication, Strengthening the Small Rural School. He also pointed out, in his article on disadvantaged rural youth in the February 1970, issue of The Review of Education Research, that 19 percent of rural youth had fallen behind at least one year in educational achievement levels, and only 12 percent of urban youth were similarly educationally retarded (Edington, 1970). Similar findings are also true in other studies. In the area of reading comprehension, Haller (1969) reported that in grades three through six, there is very little difference in rural/urban variables. In grades nine through twelve, however, the metropolitan students tend to be higher than the non-metropolitan. Henderson (1973), in his publication, "National Assessment in Rural Education," indicated that for nine-year-olds, 13-year-olds, and 17-year-olds, the extreme rural student was behind in

every case of the acceptable national percentage. Henderson also found the same situation in literature and citizenship. Haller (1969) reported on the pattern of mathematics achievement. By the sixth grade, metropolitan students tended to outscore the non-metropolitan students. There was very little difference among third graders. He found the same difference, in all age group studies, in science and citizenship, where the extreme rural was a number of points below the national percentile of acceptable scores.

Some differences were given in the 1976-77 Annual Report of Student Achievement, by the California Schools (1978). The report showed that, in grades six through twelve, reading scores, and grades six through twelve, treating mathematics, the districts with over 300,000 students had the lowest scores at each grade level and for each subject. Those districts with from 2,500 to 300,000 students showed the highest achievement. But very close behind them, and much higher than the larger districts, were those districts of under 2,500. This may indicate that the nation's most populace State may be caught in a trend where the rural student is no longer at the bottom of academic achievement lists. Rural youth fall only slightly below the suburban student and well ahead of the student from the large city schools.

In the area of educational attainment, it is typically noted that the suburban resident is almost always better educated than rural residents, regardless of sex, age, maturity, race or parentage (Edington, 1970). Abt (1977) found that 32.6 percent of the rural sample attended academic courses at two or four-year colleges as compared to 54.3 percent of the urban sample. As reported earlier in this paper, a similar disparity exists in the aspirations for post-graduate education. Generally, the student from the rural

school is at a slight disadvantage when compared to his urban parallel in the areas of scholastic achievement and educational and occupational attainment. There is, however, a later California study (1978) which shows the rural student doing better than the urban student and only slightly less well in educational achievement than his suburban counterpart.

Occupational attainment is another very important variable for measuring achievement. Both Haller (1969) and Abt (1977) found that, contrary to popular belief, young people who stay in the community are those who go to work directly out of high school, while those who leave the community are those who do so for an education. It had been thought that rural youth left the communities to find jobs. This was not the case, especially for those who had been out of school for approximately one year, as cited by Abt. They found that only 52 percent of their sample was gainfully employed, either part or full-time. Generally, rural and small school students are not as well prepared for the world of work as students from larger schools who enjoy the advantage of a broader curriculum and a comprehensive counselor service (Edington, 1976).

Self-Concept and Values

An attitude which characterizes the rural poor is a feeling that they are trapped. Hence, there are no promising choices open as a solution to their problems. This attitude often carries over into their school activities (Edington, 1970). Abt (1977) found that rural students possess a negative assessment of themselves. This is especially true between rural and suburban groups, but not necessarily so between the rural and urban groups. These differences may not be explained by population density, but by relative

disadvantage in social class. Others have recently contended that schools are socializing rural students to an urban orientation and there are growing counter-pressures to preserve rural values. They do very little, however, to describe what these rural values may be. In the Abt Study (1977), writers attempted to look at the reported differences in values in rural and urban students. As to the attitudes toward education, they found a great deal of agreement among students all over the country as to the strengths and weaknesses of their secondary schools. Overall, it was agreed that there was no strong rural profile in values about life or careers which emerged from their data. Urban students rated their extra-curricular facilities, academic instruction, and reputation in the community higher than the rural groups. The general responses of the rural graduates evidenced less positive assessments of their schools. Abt concluded that generally there are no important rural, small town, urban, or suburban distinctions in student attitudes and values toward their schools. Their data on career and life values, as well as attitudes toward schools, supported Kuvlesky's (1977) intuitions and data on the subject. Rural seniors have much in common with their urban/suburban peers in the realm of values.

Implications for the Schools

Accumulated research on rural youth points out some extremely important implications for today's schools. We find some neglected curriculum areas within the rural schools. There are serious implications for guidance programs. Pettibone and Heldt (1975) found that over 50 percent of all respondents in rural high schools in New Mexico express the opinion that high school counselors are of little or no help in forming job aspirations. Classroom teachers were considered much more helpful and occupational handbooks

achieved a better rating than either counselors or principals, who were perceived as the least helpful. This may not indicate that the rural counselor is a failure. It stresses that a large enrollment must typically be served. Also, rural students do not see the teacher as a very appropriate source of career guidance information. Counselors might well spend their time more appropriately working with teachers as an intermediary link between those supplying the latest occupational information of career choices.

Conclusions

Controversy still rages across the nation concerning the value of our rural schools, and especially their effect upon the rural student. Proponents of consolidation and the larger school quickly point out the deficiencies in curriculum and ancillary services. Proponents of the small school quickly counter with the closeness and communication that exists between students and teachers, plus the students' youthful importance as members of the small school community. Long-term evidence tells us that, if the school disappears, the community may also disappear. Historically, the defenders of the small school have been hampered by a lack of adequate hard data. This may be changing in such a mode to indicate that rural school students are better adjusted in a social sense. However, there is also some evidence pointing out that they often do not achieve as well in college. Also, they are not as well prepared for employment or further education as their suburban counterparts. Generally, rurals do fare academically better than youth in the large urban centers.

References

Abt, P. W., Bock, G., English, P., & Marx, T. J. One year out: Reports of rural high school graduates. Cambridge, Mass.: Abt Associates, Inc., 1977. ERIC ED 148010.

DeBlassie, R. R., & Ludeman, M. Guidance programs and practices in rural and small schools. Las Cruces: New Mexico State University, ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, 1973. ERIC ED 081533.

Edington, E. D., Pettibone, T. J., and Heldt, J. E. Educational, occupational, and residence aspirations and expectations for rural and minority youth in New Mexico. Las Cruces: New Mexico State University, ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, 1975. ERIC ED 116845.

Edington, E. D. Strengthening the small rural school. Las Cruces: New Mexico State University, ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, 1976. ERIC ED 115408.

Edington, E. D. Disadvantaged rural youth: Review of educational research. Washington, D.C.: American Educational Research Association, 1970.

Haller, A. O. Rural education and the educational and occupational attainments of youth. Las Cruces: New Mexico State University, Educational Resources Information Center Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, 1969. ERIC ED 029748.

Henderson, G. National assessment and rural education. Las Cruces: New Mexico State University, ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, 1973. ERIC ED 085127.

Hughes, L. W., & Spence, D. L. Attitudes and orientations of rural groups and effects on educational decision-making and innovation in rural school districts. Las Cruces: New Mexico State University, ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, 1973. ERIC ED 085127.

Kuvlesky, W. P. Ethnic group identity and occupational status projections of teenage boys and girls: Mexican American, Black, Native American, and Anglo youth. Dallas, Texas: Paper presented at the Southwestern Sociological Association Annual Meeting, April 1976. ERIC ED 121499.

Kuvlesky, W. P. Counseling needs of rural teenagers: What can we do with the family? West Lafayette, Ind.: Paper presented at the Second Annual Childhood Development and Family Studies Program of Purdue University, February 7-8, 1977. ERIC ED 134371.

Law, A. I. Student achievement in California schools, 1976-77 annual report. Sacramento: California State Department of Education, 1978.

McClurkin, W. D. Rural education in the United States. Las Cruces: New Mexico State University, ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, 1970. ERIC ED 043408.

Sher, J. P. Education in rural America. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Special Studies in Education, 1977.

U. S. Bureau of the Census. 1972 census of governments: Governmental organization (Vol. 1). Washington, D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, July 1973.